

Lynching continues

The char areas need stronger administrative presence

WITH the lynching of three more alleged robbers by the local people, the number of those killed in the last four days in the char areas in the Noakhali district has risen to 31 no doubt an appalling figure that gives a grim account of law and order.

We have voiced our concern over this particular kind of mob justice that is being meted out to the suspected pirates or jungle bandits. We emphasise, as we did in our earlier editorial, the point that such killings are legally and morally unacceptable. It is not enough to say that the killers were aggrieved villagers who acted out of an urge to finish off a nagging menace the presence of bandits. An accused has to be treated as being innocent until proven guilty. And an even bigger pitfall lies in the possibility of innocents being victimised in the anarchical situation that arises when an angry mob targets some people. Mob justice, under such circumstances, is very likely to deliver gross injustice only.

Since that is how most people look at the issue, the question arises as to why the police remained mute spectators to the killings. Were they overwhelmed or cowered by the mob? If so, they fell far short of performing their duty, which was to enforce the law, not allowing others to take it in their hands. It sent the signal that there was abdication of the law enforcement authority, involuntary though it might have been, that ultimately resulted in such a big number of deaths.

The char areas have become crime-prone because of lax administrative control due largely to the absence of physical facilities. The areas need a stronger administrative presence to ward off the threats that pirates and bandits pose to the local people. There is also the problem of bloody clashes among people over possession of new chars. Such accretions must be brought under land settlement to preclude the possibility of locals relying on muscle-power to grab land. It will also help development of more organised community life, a prerequisite for law and order, in the remote areas.

US bars war opponents from Iraq bidding

No way to make friends

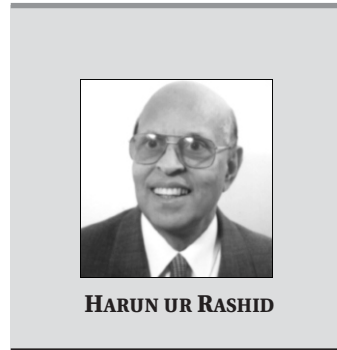
THE US has barred French, German, Canadian and Russian companies from bidding on \$18.6 billion in contracts for the reconstruction of Iraq. The US claims that the directive is essential to protect its security interests, but Bush administration officials had previously suggested that countries that did not join the US-led coalition would be cut out of the lucrative rebuilding of Iraq. It is clear that the formalisation of this policy is a retaliatory measure for these countries' opposition to the US-led invasion of Iraq in March.

The step draws flak on two counts. The first is that in issuing the directive, the US is acting like the worst kind of colonial power. The US may be administering Iraq but it does not own it. It has neither the legal nor the moral authority to make such a decision with respect to Iraq's reconstruction, a responsibility that legitimately belonged to the UN. It betrays the Bush administration's imperial mindset. Furthermore, this policy can only serve to confirm the skepticism of those who believe that the US invaded Iraq for financial and geo-political advantage.

The second count is that the Bush administration has once again demonstrated the petty vindictiveness and arrogance that has been the hallmark of its foreign policy. The US, frankly, needs all the assistance it can get in Iraq. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, who issued the directive, suggested that it would encourage other countries to join the coalition in Iraq. On the contrary, however, it is likely to further alienate the US from its erstwhile allies and make the reconstruction process even more difficult.

The US alienated the world by bullying and blustering its way to war in Iraq over the objections of the world community. Now it proposes to compound this blunder by punishing those countries that attempted to stand up to its bullying. With this latest directive, the Bush administration further demonstrates its disregard for world opinion and its evident belief that the rest of the world better do as the US says, or else. If the Bush administration carries on like this, soon the US will have hardly any friends left.

Why does President Bush avoid funeral ceremonies of US soldiers?



HARUN UR RASHID

THERE was a time when the US presidents or very senior members of the administration used to share the sorrow of the families of soldiers, killed in war, by attending memorial services. President Bill Clinton was on the tarmac to receive the dead from the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000. Presidents Reagan and Carter attended services for the 241 killed in Beirut and for the troops killed in the failed hostage-rescue in Iran.

The Bush administration departed from this traditional practice. Neither the president nor any of his senior members of the team such as Vice President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld or the Secretary of State Colin Powell attends the funeral ceremony of the deceased US personnel killed in Iraq.

President Bush and his senior members of his administration have fenced off themselves from funeral ceremonies and banned cameramen entering the central military morgue at Dover, in Delaware state where hundreds who died in Iraq were received. It is also difficult for the photographers to get past security at the Walter Reed Army Medical Centre in Washington, where thousands of the wounded in Iraq are being treated.

The question is: Why?

The American dead and the injured from Iraq are being ignored by the Bush administration so as to give the impression to the public in the US that nothing wrong has been happening in Iraq. The administration wants to claim that it is the US soldiers who are winning the game in Iraq and everything is going on as planned. Many consider that this behaviour of the administration is compared to that

of the New York Times recently wrote: "No juxtaposition is too absurd to stop Bush officials from insisting nothing is wrong. Car bombs and a blitz of air-to-ground missiles turned Iraq into a hideous tangle of ambulances, stretchers and dead bodies, just after Paul Wolfowitz, arrived there to show-case success."

It is reported that some Republican commentators have begun to question the President's aloofness.

media have become subservient to the US administration in a country known for its objective and fair reporting.

No nation is more replete with patriotic imagery in word, in song and symbol than America. This is inherently nothing wrong. However patriotism is being fully exploited to advance the ideology of the administration. The more uncritical the kind of patriotism that rules popular imagination, the

losses in Iraq, the President storms the country with his hand out for tens of millions of dollars in donations for his forthcoming re-election campaign. But does he avoid photo-opportunity with the mothers of the dead from Iraq?

No wonder the public in the US is being disillusioned by the rhetoric of the Bush administration. For the first time since the opening attack on Baghdad on March 20, most Americans -- 51% -- report-

within the administration seem to distance the President and the families of the dead from Iraq.

The Bush administration's change of heart to transfer power to Iraqis by the end of June next year is propelled by the fragile security situation and the mounting death toll in Iraq. During the Vietnam War it took two years from 1963 to end of 1964, for American combat deaths to reach 324. The US has surpassed that figure in Iraq in only seven months where at the time of writing 398 American servicemen died. The last exit strategy in Vietnam was Vietnamisation, training South Vietnamese to fight the North Vietnamese and guerrillas. Now the buzzword is Iraqisation.

Just as President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair began joint a press conference in London in November, the bombers hit the British targets in Istanbul with utter devastation and turned the conference into somber reality that their efforts to contain terrorism had miserably failed in attacking Iraq. Both of them perhaps realize that the two countries under their leaderships have been sucked into escalating cycle of violence.

The president's avoidance of attending funerals of the American dead soldiers brings to mind one story that during the Vietnam war when the then US Defence Secretary Robert McNamara was told: "Mr. Secretary, we have got serious problems here. You ought to know what they are." And McNamara replied: "I don't want to hear about your problems. I want to hear about progress." It seems that same story is repeated now in the case of American occupation in Iraq.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladeshi Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

The president's avoidance of attending funerals of the American dead soldiers brings to mind one story that during the Vietnam war when the then US Defence Secretary Robert McNamara was told: "Mr. Secretary, we have got serious problems here. You ought to know what they are." And McNamara replied: "I don't want to hear about your problems. I want to hear about progress." It seems that same story is repeated now in the case of American occupation in Iraq.

of "Comical Ali" of Iraq (Information Minister Mohammad Saeed al-Sahaf) who assured reporters, even as US tanks rumbled in Baghdad, that: "There are no American infidels in Baghdad. Never!"

One of the reasons for such callous regard for the dead soldiers appears to be that the Bush administration knows at its heart that Iraq war was unprovoked and illegal under international law. The war began with illogic: false intelligence used to bolster a false "imminent threat" to the US. The same illogic continues today: the more Americans die, the more it is a sign of US progress in Iraq.

The illogical conclusions led the administration to conclude that it is desirable not to meet the reality of war, the dead soldiers coming in bags to the US. It seems that they do not understand the political implications of sidetracking truth. As the columnist Maureen Dowd in

But asked about the remarkable Presidential silence that greeted the death of 15-soldiers in the downing of a Chinook helicopter in Iraq early last month, Dan Barlett, the president's communications director, defended: "If a helicopter were hit an hour later, after he (the President) came out and spoke, should he come out again? The public wants the commander-in-chief to have a proper perspective and to keep his eye on the big picture and on the ball." This seems to be the classic statement of spin-doctors to protect the president.

Many political observers have commented on the Bush administration's ongoing war with the media. The administration is attacking them for using the term "resistance fighters" in Iraq and for not reporting "good news" out of Iraq. It is surprisingly noted that majority of print and electronic

more insulated and different the American people feel. As Dr. Samuel Johnson famously noted in 1775, on the eve of the American Revolution, "Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel."

After the September 11 attacks, the Bush administration has not only told the stories from its own perspective but also attempted to influence the rest of the world. However the Qatar-based Al Jazeera TV has come out boldly with real stories in Iraq. As Lewis Lapham, Editor of Harper's Magazine, put it in 1997: "I wonder how a society can long endure by defining truth as the acceptance of untruth, or by passing legislation incapable of being enforced, or by thinking that freedom is a trust fund inherited at birth and certain to a lifetime."

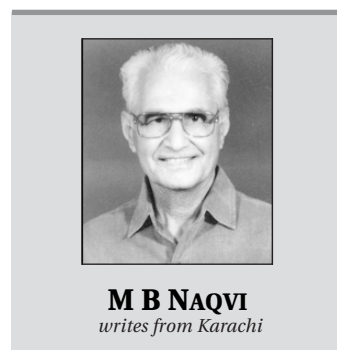
Commentators in the US have pointed out that while families and communities grieve about their

edly disapprove of the president's handling of the war. In a Washington Post/ABC News opinion poll taken before the Chinook helicopter disaster, 87% of respondents said that they feared the US would be bogged down in Iraq and 62% regarded the death toll as unacceptable.

Meanwhile George Soros, one of the world's richest men, reportedly told the media that he had a new project in his hand: beating President George Bush. He said, "It is the central focus of my life and the presidential race in 2004 is a matter of life and death... America under Bush, is a danger to the world. I am willing to put my money where my mouth is."

With the passing of each week, the war touches thousands more American families in the most direct way. But the President moves on with rhetoric of "progress" in Iraq and the spin doctors

Hindutva's dash for power



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

LAST week's poll results in four key states of India have belied the expectations of Indian commentators. It was generally thought that Congress would more or less easily retain three states of Delhi, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan while Madhya Pradesh had seemed wobbly. In the event, BJP has been swept to power in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, leaving only Delhi to Congress, where CM Sheila Dixit's excellent stewardship of the Capital area had paid off. What does this portend?

There are some easy explanations, of course. Incumbency factor can be cited; people had become tired of Congress rule that could deliver so little. This factor was known to all commentators. How could they be so sanguine as to go on holding that Congress was likely to retain Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, not to mention Delhi, almost to the last? They obviously under-estimated the attractiveness of BJP's stock in trade: Hindutva.

Much has been made of so-called real issues for the voters: "bijli, pani aur sarak" (electricity, water and roads). Doubtless these are crucially important to both rural and urban voters. But are the results shaped mainly by this criterion? The record of Congress' long rule almost everywhere is known and has been largely lacklustre; the party is known for its corruption, factionalism and neglect of the common voters, though it has a well-oiled election machine with more or less enough resources. In comparison, BJP was an outsider though it had much going for it in these polls: a friendly government at the centre, the steel framework of RSS organisation, claims of being a different and clean party, abundance of funds

and above all the heady slogan of Hindutva based on Hindu cultural nationalism.

Doubtless, the Congress defeats in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are significant. The former was being run by the ever-active Mr. Digvijay Singh with claims to personal charisma and the ambition of making MP his redoubt from where he can rise to power in Delhi in the fullness of time. All observers thought he would trounce the BJP by his responsiveness, good governance and his

India. But it was a banyan tree under which nothing else grew. What was its historic role? It was always an ambiguous broad church that accommodated all shades of ideologies from soft left to hard right. Nehru, the Fabian socialist, came to represent all non Communist left, and combining it with enlightened nationalism, he had the foresight to see that all communalisms, Hindus, Muslim or others, will be destructive to India's unity and integrity. Hence his insistence on secular as well as

power, in preference to a distinctive social, political and economic programme, implies many things: it is a basic ideological denial of the democratic idea; all Indians might be equal in the inherited law but Hindus are more equal -- and more Indian -- than other Indians. Which is where Fascism, the ideological retreat from the democratic idea, rushes in. That, given the huge diversities that is India, such a cultural nationalism necessarily runs foul of democracy -- without which there is no way to keep the

achievements in politics and economics had left 50 per cent of Indians dirt poor. Congress and BJP have the same economic programme of implementing the globalisation agenda. While the underdevelopment of the society remained the Achilles' heel of the Congress rule, BJP with its communal Hindutva plank -- conceived to deprive the Muslims their privileges -- now seems to be poised to win power at the Centre on its own. The stragglers of the soft left, typified now by George Fernandes and

to coincide with the needs and sensitivities of people in specific situations.

The big problem of Indian politics is that Congress had grown politically flabby; the loss of UP and Bihar should be taken to mean that it is in a terminal decline. After a series of setbacks it appeared that South and Central India will remain in the Congress fold. Now no one can be so sure about the chances of both BJP and Congress next year as a result of complicated interpenetration of the caste with Congress' secular nationalist appeal as well as with Hindutva. For some time after BJP's accession to power, it seemed Congress might somehow stage a come back -- after all it still ruled 14 states. Now, few can be too sure; Congress, historically speaking, has played its role and should now yield primacy to a new force. It does seem as if BJP does not fit that bill despite its three stunning victories in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.

India seems to need a substantially new political force that can rise above religious and caste divisions while meeting the real challenges made sharper by the much-acclaimed recent economic successes. The old communist left is more or less at sea these days. Followers of the Fourth International, shorn of sound and fury, are not much better in evolving new solutions to old problems. There is need for a new Left -- not like Blair's New Labour -- that studies concrete problems of Indian society and produces solutions to resolve concrete problems.

The World Social Forum, with its all too diffused focus, is soon meeting in Bombay. There is also another Forum meeting there that wants to focus more sharply at the concrete problems created by the progress of globalisation. The two are said to be complementary to each other. One would wish all national chapters to grapple with the concrete problems being aggravated by the globalisation agenda. It is in this context that new political forces in South Asia can be conceived and hopefully grow.

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PLAIN WORDS

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recent metamorphosis from being an uncompromising secularist into one who peddled "soft Hindutva" -- a sort of me-too-ism. He should now be a more sober politician because the MP voter put his trust mainly in the BJP. In a house of 230, BJP has captured 173 seats and Congress could retain only 38 seats. Digvijay Singh's personal PR was at least as good as his record of being alert in listening to people's problems. And yet voters deserted him and the Congress. Why?

On a somewhat lesser scale, the same holds for Rajasthan. No serious Indian observer had any misgiving of Congress not retaining this state, the CM of which remained firmly secular in the face of concerted onslaught of the Sangh parivar. Led by a reasonably efficient CM, Rajasthan had seemed like a Congress fort. But it too crumbled. Not that any BJP-ruled state could show a better record in terms of bijlee, pani aur sarak or better governing. Except Gujarat, where Hindutva showed its militant face, and UP and Bihar, no BJP-ruled state was able to resist Congress in earlier state elections, although it did deploy Hindutva everywhere. But this time the BJP could trump whatever Congress could say. Strange, isn't it?

Until recently, the Congress was the only show in town for most of

democratic politics. Nehru ruled India for the initial 18 years and imparted his own image to both India and Congress. But both needed qualifications.

At no time was Hindu communalism -- or call it today's nationalism -- absent from India. Even in the heyday of Nehru, the Hindu communalists or nationalists always had a presence in politics -- parliament and on the platform. BJP is the recent name of the party that was earlier known as Hindu Mahasabha which later became Jana Sangh, always shot through and through with persons owing allegiance to Rashtrya Sewam Sevak Sangh (RSS). It always polled a sizeable chunk of the urban Hindu vote even when Nehru's fame and power outshone everyone else's. The Congress image remained secular for some time after Nehru. But the six years of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1970s heavily compromised it, though articulation of secular identity continues. Even during Nehru's own day, Babu Rajinder Prasad, Radhakrishnan, Sardar Patel, even Rajaji and many others shared secularism rather partially.

There is no reason why most Hindus should not take pride in their ancient civilisation. But making this a militant cultural nationalism and a basis for seeking

allegiance of all Indians intact.

The trouble with Hindutva, like its Islamic rough counterpart -- Nizam-i-Islam -- is that the Hindu has to be defined to be favoured and empowered by the state. The moment you try to define a Hindu, as is the case with the Muslims, a thousand smaller and more ethnic or realistic (caste) identities of the Hindus begin clamouring for primary allegiance. Just as a simple homogenised Muslim gets pushed out by a Sunni or Shia or the poverty stricken or a Sindh, Baloch or Pathan, similarly there may be no uncomplicated, synthesised or homogenised Hindu. India is chockfull of identities based on ethnicity, caste or faith. Already Hindutva seems less attractive to people with cultural heritages of their own in peripheral regions while in 'central' or Hindi-speaking areas Hindutva seems to have much attraction, though at the cost of the political rise of new caste identities, subverting simple Hindutva of higher castes. The conclusion is valid for India as well as Pakistan that religion-based identities produce their own nemesis -- and soon.

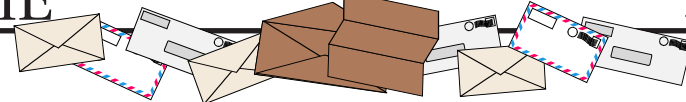
What the soft left, including Nehru's, has achieved is largely known. Nehru's land reforms laid the foundations of India's true industrialisation. Undoubted

earlier by Ram Manohar Lohia, are bag carriers of BJP. They can scarcely be distinguished from other Hindu communalists.

Simple majoritarianism, conceived in religious terms, is destructive of good governance and equality. A majority can only be empowered or favoured at the cost of minorities, religious as well as others. It is based fundamentally on the inequality of men, women and children. Its determined pursuit can only be possible if minorities are deprived of not only their rights but the opportunities of protest. Authoritarianism is thus woven into the warp and woof of religion-based politics. If the minorities fear BJP, it is only natural.

Rise of BJP in India underscores the fact that the Left in India has not been able in 57 years to make its presence felt in the huge Hindi-speaking belt. It is not easy to understand the complex and complicated mind sets that were produced in areas in widening circles around the centres of Medieval and Colonial power; hard left was too great a slave to what the Comintern approved. They never evolved their own policies and objectives based on objective realities on the ground. Where they did succeed seems to be where the general Comintern line happened

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

US remitters' problem

After the 9/11 tragedy, the US government has taken many preventive steps to ward off repetition of such heinous crimes.

One such step is restriction on transfer of money from one state to the other by the foreigners residing there. Bangladeshi remitters have been sending their money through Sonali Exchange located in New York. The remitters staying in different states are now unable to send their money through Sonali Exchange, the remitting charges of which are reasonable. Many people are sending money through private banks but the charges are too high, more than thirty times higher than usual.

This restriction of the US gov-

ernment is meant for such criminal groups or persons who could be using funds for destructive purposes. With a little persuasion, our embassy in the US may convince the US authorities to waive such restriction for Bangladeshi remitters up to \$3,000 or so a month.

I hope our finance ministry will urge our embassy officials in the US to negotiate and get the embargo lifted for the remitters. The US government is not against genuine remittances, one must not forget.

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The cost of hesitancy

In these fast-moving times, hesi-

tancy at the top policy and decision-making levels in public affairs costs a lot. This situation is independent of place, location, level, and the state of the operators.

Hesitation occurs in decision-making, planning, execution, monitoring feedback, appraisal, and forecast, due to uncertainties prevailing in the information available for processing. Starved inputs stall the system. Fluid situations cannot provide solid basis for forging ahead with schemes and plans. The waiting period is nagging on the corporate or control room nerves. Tension rises, but there is no relief for lowering the pressure. It is a test for lonely leadership at the top management level.

This was well brought out by the

Reuters despatch sometime this year from Washington. "Fog of war clouds US economic outlook." If some quarters like to give credit to the elusive legend Osama bin Laden, his Think Tank gets a point here. This is the second point; the first point was the way the WTC towers were destroyed (9/11), fooling the US intelligence agencies (what a shame of incompetence!).

For US, Iraq may be a contingency play for diversion. In the gloomy background, it is the economy! The politicians never spill out their weaknesses; one lie needs nine more to cover it. The American life-style is to think big, and do things in a big way (big bang in Afghanistan looks so ludicrous!). Now they are imitating the big style

in Iraq--for the second time. Now al-Qaeda is claiming credit for the blasting of the apartment complex in Riyadh. The US embassies have been closed in more than one Islamic country in the ME. The Yankees would not be allowed to reside in ME, that is the game plan of some of the US enemies.

For consolation, the Yankee mind should be satisfied with Nature's bounty of providing human insulation by planting two mighty oceans (Atlantic and Pacific) on both sides. Nothing much in the North, and Washington does not understand the Latin swings in South America; and in between, the Mexicans are not very happy, but chilly is supposed to be popular in that country. Why these huge bush fires in California Nature

is not interested in human politics?

The high-speed mobility of the Americans is out of tune with the morning strollers with light pockets. Who stroll? Those who are mentally free for a while; and also can overlook economic insecurity momentarily. Literature has recorded the blessing of the morning breeze known as 'naseem'; but unfortunately, it is different from the US President's morning cup of coffee.

Now the pundits are trying to read the tea leaves in the morning cup. While elusive Saddam is a pain in the neck, Bush can hardly afford to destroy Iraq, but not the mega-economy of the USA. Charity and criticism begin at home. When the time comes, it ticks louder. Now the Shiites have rebelled against

the US occupation.

Blair will go down in history with the bizarre idea of trying to hide the past glory of the British Empire with the tiny American stars and stripes. Under similar circumstances what Churchill would have done? Never in the history of Downing Street was so much commission offered for so little success.

Bush and Saddam have now become symbols in the new and old worlds. Is the first phase of civilisation ending in the New World, and history's retracing its steps over Asia? In between, the European Union is feeling so uncomfortable, that from time to time it becomes almost incoherent. The French are musing over the layers of their cultural leadership; and the Germans won't take it

lying down. The Turks are making a mistake in eyeing Europe positively. The secular bug is itching. It has to, because this man-made concoction is a modern human genome without parentage and antiquity. Have the scientists calculated the half-life of secularism?

Two taboo words leak out time and again: economics and religion. One had to be invented, and the other concocted, it appears that the economic wheel has to be re-invented. The other is merely rusty, through disuse. Regardless of these conjectures the future lies ahead, in four dimensions, ready to cook. The problem is with the processing in the kitchen, not in the pantry.

Md. Abad

Dhaka